

Statement of Councilmember Phil Andrews Regarding Tentative Approval of
Fiscal Year 2015 Operating Budget
May 15, 2014

“I am very pleased that the Council unanimously voted for the third straight year to reduce the huge 2010 increase in the energy tax, a proposal I made in March in order to improve the County’s economic competitiveness and keep the promise made by the County Council and County Executive in 2010. Reducing the energy tax has been difficult because the County Executive has used revenues from it to fund large salary increases for County employees. To its credit, the Council got it done anyway.

It was crucial that the County Council provide support for Montgomery County Public Schools without exceeding the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) level required by the State. Had the Council approved County Executive Leggett’s proposal to exceed the MOE level by \$26 million, it would have locked taxpayers into paying \$26 million more annually indefinitely, a total of \$260 million over the next decade. I am pleased that the Council unanimously voted to fund the entire MCPS budget request without going above MOE and without handcuffing taxpayers and future County Councils. That’s why I am pleased to vote for this MCPS budget.

I am also pleased that the Council approved my proposals to increase funding for infrastructure repairs by \$10 million, to add a total of 10 additional School Resource (police) Officers (SROs) to improve school safety, and to add funds for expansion of library hours. I hope that the Department of Libraries will choose to use those funds to open all libraries on Sundays, the day of the week when the most people are not working and can use libraries. All of our County liquor stores are open on Sundays, and it shouldn’t be harder to check out a book than to check out the County’s wine selection.

However, I am very concerned that the Council approved pay raises for County employees of 6.75% to 9.75% for a second consecutive year – excessive raises that County Executive Leggett agreed to with our County unions. County employees work hard, do an excellent job delivering important services, and deserve a pay raise, but the raises need to be reasonable and sustainable, not excessive and unsustainable. These raises will cost \$73 million in FY2015 and \$85 million in FY2016. Since pay and benefits comprise 70 per cent of the County Government’s budget and drive tax rates, and since the level of pay raises approved will make it difficult to keep taxes at reasonable levels, I voted against the County Government budget.

In many ways, the overall budget contains many things that will benefit the residents and businesses of the County. I am glad I was able to help shape many important parts of this budget that would not have been included without the Council’s input. That is why I voted to approve the overall operating budget.”